



Testimony of  
Jo-Anne Basile, Executive Director  
CT Votes for Animals  
Before  
The Joint Committee on the Environment  
March, 3, 2021  
On

**Supporting SB 925 and Supporting HB 6504 With Reservations**

Senate Co-Chair Christine Cohen, House Co-Chair Dorinda Borer, Vice Chairs Senator Derek Slap, Representative Joseph Gresko, Ranking Members Senator Miner and Representative Stephan Harding, Honorable Members of the Joint Committee on the Environment.

**SB 925: AA Prohibiting the Import, Sale and Possession of African Wildlife.** Connecticut Votes for Animals, an animal advocacy organization representing more than 5,500 CT residents, strongly support policies that involve Connecticut's participation in saving imperiled animals from needless slaughter, including trophy hunting, poaching and wildlife trafficking. **Accordingly, CVA strongly supports SB 925 An Act Prohibiting the Import, Sale and Possession of African Elephants, Lions, Leopards, Black Rhinoceros, White Rhinoceros and Giraffes.**

"Trophy hunting," the type of hunting targeted by this Act, is defined as killing wild animals for body parts but not primarily for food or sustenance. The parts, or whole pieces such as heads and antlers, are mostly used for home and office display and decoration. The activity is often fueled by competition where awards are granted for specific and voluminous kills across the globe. In the ten years ending 2014, US based hunters imported more than 1.26 million wildlife trophies. Between 2005 and 2014, trophies of 5,605 African lions were imported in the U.S., a shocking average of 560 per year.

CT does not have clean hands when it comes to the trophy business of hunting African Wildlife. In a similar timeframe, CT hunters were issued more than 100 hunting licenses by the USFWS for Africa's most majestic animals – lions, leopards, elephants and giraffe. According to Friends of Animals, between 2005-2020, Connecticut residents killed 71 leopards, 39 lions and a giraffe. They also killed seven elephants. The USFWS considers all of the "Big Six" species (identified above) endangered or threatened except for the giraffe, which is now classed by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) as "vulnerable to extinction."

Arguments that trophy hunting generates revenues for remote areas are flawed, as it has been estimated that a pittance, only 3%, of expenditures, actually -fund conservation or development. A lack of monitoring and enforcement in host countries, and the growing evidence that trophy hunting creates a legal market for poachers are all reasons to enact SB 925. African wildlife are the most vulnerable species on the brink of extinction. SB 925 allows Connecticut with the opportunity to do its part in protecting vulnerable species from needless slaughter. CVA applauds the Committee's actions over the past two years when it overwhelmingly supported similar bills. CVA trusts your commitment remains strong and the Committee will once again act favourably on SB 925.

**HB 6504, An Act Concerning Animal Welfare - Support with Reservations**

CVA thanks the Committee for bringing forward HB 6504 and the many positive revisions it makes to CT's statutes. The Department of Agriculture is to be commended with its successful administration of the Animal Population Control Program (APCP). CVA specifically thanks the Department's proposal to

increase from 10 to 20% the amount of funds available to sterilize and vaccinate feral cats. This has been a remarkably successful program where all the funds available are used for their stated purpose.

CVA also supports the Department's proposal to increase the veterinarian voucher allowances for cats and dogs. The participation of veterinarians is an obvious critical element to the success of CT's program. The rates for the vouchers have not kept pace with the cost of inflation and as a result, veterinarians are finding it difficult to continue participation. The proposed increase will go a long way in helping to ameliorate that situation.

CVA would encourage the Committee to review and consider lowering or giving the Department the flexibility to lower the mandated \$300,000 limit by which the Department must cease issuing low-income vouchers in a fiscal year. The Committee may be unaware but last year, the \$300,000 limit was reached in December 2020. In effect the Department had to cease offering low-income vouchers six months into the program. They are unable to issue vouchers until the new fiscal year begins July 2021. CVA believes this is a problem in the program and demands that a remedy be investigated.

Lastly and importantly CVA would like to bring to the Committee's attention our concern about the proposed definition change of "animal" as presented in HB 6504. Several policy & legal experts have reviewed the proposed changes and we are perplexed as to why the term has been modified in this fashion. As we understand it, the term "animal" has been redefined and removes animals who were not bred, born and raised in captivity. This redefinition has a real possibility to endanger community cats and wildlife, at a minimum, by removing animal control protections for these animals. As we understand it, the change will:

- Leave a void in overseeing community cats by removing protections offered by Animal Control Officers. The new definition of "animal" appears to exempt creatures such as feral cats who were *"not bred, born and raised in captivity"*;
- Stop Animal Control Officers from intervening in wildlife cruelty situations;
- Potentially create confused interpretations in other sections of the law.

If we are misreading the proposed change, we ask for a clear explanation so we better understand the Department's intentions and its plan to protect these animals. If our interpretation is correct, we ask that the definition be modified so feral cats and wildlife are afforded the protection they deserve under CT statutes.

We are available to work with the Committee and or Department to clarify this section of the proposal.

CVA thanks the Committee for the opportunity to present our views on these two bills.

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